



Mayor and Cabinet

Report title: Out of Hours Switchboard Procurement

Date: 15th June 2022

Key decision: Yes

Class: Part One.

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors:

Executive Director, Corporate Resources.

Outline and recommendations

The purpose of this report is to seek agreement from Mayor & Cabinet (Contracts) to make a direct award to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for the provision of a Borough-wide Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard for a period of three years with the option to extend for a period of up to 3 years.

The report demonstrates the quality of service currently provided to Lewisham by the Royal Borough of Greenwich, the financial rationale and quality implications for continuing this arrangement.

The report further considers the relative merits, costs and quality implications for returning the service in-house, partaking in pan-London arrangements and for out-sourcing to an external vendor.

Following those considerations, it is recommended that the Mayor and Cabinet approve the direct award of a contract to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for a further period of three years with the option to extend for a period of up to 3 years thereafter to supply the Council's Out of Hours switchboard commencing 15th September 2022.

This will involve expenditure of £240,000 per annum; a total of £720,000 over a three year period, with a total expenditure of £1,440,000 over a six year period. These prices are fixed for the entire six year period.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

During January 2022, a revised specification for the Out of Hours Switchboard was drawn up in consultation with the following stakeholders which represents all Council services using the Out of Hours Switchboard:

- Social services
- Enablement
- Noise pollution
- Highways
- Transport
- Trees
- Parks
- Emergency Planning Procedures
- Animal welfare/ Stray Dogs
- Building/ Facilities issues and Key holders
- Dangerous structures
- Housing (Homelessness, Rough Sleepers, Repairs)
- Press/ Media Contacts
- Customer Service Centre Management Escalations
- COVID-19 Advice
- Street Cleansing
- Travellers
- Registrars

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1. Summary

- 1.1. This is a summary of the report and details including risks, financial and legal implications are found in the full report.
- 1.2. This report details the provision of Lewisham's Out of Hours Switchboard covering a variety of Council services from Monday to Friday, from 5pm to 9am, at weekends and on Bank Holidays.
- 1.3. The report lists a number of options including bringing the service back in-house, outsourcing the service and entering into pan-London arrangements as well as continuing with the current partnership with the Royal Borough of Greenwich.
- 1.4. The costs, risks and merits of each approach are detailed in the report.
- 1.5. The report concludes with a recommendation that Lewisham continue with current partnership working with the Royal Borough of Greenwich for a further period of three years with options to extend this by a further three years thereafter.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Mayor and Cabinet approve a direct award of a contract to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for a period of three years with the option to extend for up to a further three years to supply the Council's Out of Hours switchboard commencing 15th September 2022. This will involve expenditure of £240,000 per annum with a total contract value of £1,440,000 over a six year period.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1. The Council launched its new corporate strategy in 2019 with seven priorities as stated below:

Corporate Priorities

- **Open Lewisham** - Lewisham will be a place where diversity and cultural heritage is recognised as a strength and is celebrated.
- **Tackling the housing crisis** - Everyone has a decent home that is secure and affordable.
- **Giving children and young people the best start in life** - Every child has access to an outstanding and inspiring education, and is given the support they need to keep them safe, well and able to achieve their full potential.
- **Building and inclusive local economy** - Everyone can access high-quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy.
- **Delivering and defending health, social care and support** - Ensuring everyone receives the health, mental health, social care and support services they need.
- **Making Lewisham greener** - Everyone enjoys our green spaces, and benefits from a healthy environment as we work to protect and improve our local environment.
- **Building safer communities** - Every resident feels safe and secure living here as we work together towards a borough free from the fear of crime.

- 3.2. This report specifically relates to services impacting the following priorities:

- Tackling the housing crisis

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- Giving children and young people the best start in life
 - Delivering and defending health, social care and support
 - Making Lewisham greener
 - Building safer communities
- 3.3. The provision of a high quality, scalable, Out of Hours Switchboard allows residents to get in touch with the council easily at any time should they find themselves in a vulnerable situation. This provides them with a feeling of safety and re-assurance. The Switchboard puts people in touch with Council experts to report issues such as anti-social behaviour, noise, dangerous structures or to get in touch with Social Workers and the Emergency Services. This ensures residents are able to feel safe and secure living here, as we work together towards a borough free from the fear of crime.

4. Background

- 4.1. As part of savings agreed in 2014 to take effect from the 2015/16 financial year, the Customer Service Centre was asked to look at more cost efficient means of delivering the out of hours switchboard service which had been in-house until that time. After investigation into alternative ways of delivering the service, it was agreed that the Royal Borough of Greenwich would deliver the service on the Council's behalf. A contract was entered into for a period of one year as of 15th September 2015.
- 4.2. Following a full appraisal of options and approval of a report by Mayor and Cabinet, the Royal Borough of Greenwich was awarded a subsequent contract to provide the service for a period of three years from September 2016 to September 2019.
- 4.3. After a further appraisal of options and approval of a report by Mayor and Cabinet, the Royal Borough of Greenwich was again awarded a contract to provide the service for a period of three years from September 2019 to September 2022.
- 4.4. The service is provided from 5pm until 9am Monday to Friday and at weekends and on bank holidays, operated from the Woolwich Centre.
- 4.5. Three members of Lewisham staff were transferred to the Royal Borough of Greenwich under TUPE in September 2015, of which one has subsequently retired.
- 4.6. The contract provided savings of over £200,000 per annum compared to the cost of providing the service in-house. In addition, more robust data capture and improved arrangements for Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery were achieved and more suitable office accommodation provided.
- 4.7. As in both 2015, 2016 and 2019, a specification for the Out of Hours Switchboard has been drawn up in consultation with all stakeholders across the Council setting out Lewisham's requirements in detail.
- 4.8. Since September 2015, the Royal Borough of Greenwich has received over 130,000 calls on behalf of Lewisham and achieved the following Key Performance Indicators (KPI's):

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Year	Calls Offered	% Calls Answered (Target \geq 95%)	% Calls answered within 30 seconds (Target \geq 80%)	Complaints Received (Target \leq 1 per 10,000 calls)
2016	29,010	96.99%	90.65%	2
2017	28,374	97.48%	91.22%	0
2018	23,746	96.23%	90.36%	0
2019	15,949	97.7%	93.5%	0
2020	16,299	95.4%	89.0%	0
2021	20,306	87.1%	77.3%	0

- 4.9. The Royal Borough of Greenwich have a track-record of successfully delivering both the Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard since September 2015 as well as their own Out of Hours service, which is very similar in scope and customer expectations since February 2007. Prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Royal Borough of Greenwich had worked hard to actively reduce call volumes. Prior to this period, all Lewisham KPI's had been met or exceeded since September 2015. There was a temporary drop in performance in 2021 due to COVID-19 related staff absence.
- 4.10. The Call types can be broken down as follows based upon data from January to December 2021:

Call Type	% of Overall Calls
Social Services	95.4%
Highways/Trees	1.96%
Noise Pollution	0.97%
Emergency Services	0.5%
Parks/Cemeteries	0.39%

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Repairs to Public Buildings	0.29%
Animal Welfare	0.23%
General Complaints	0.17%
Registration Services	0.09%

- 4.11. Following the options appraisal set out below, it is considered that continuation of the service being handled by the Royal Borough of Greenwich, provides the best overall quality of service whilst continuing to offer significant savings compared to in-house provision of the service.

5. Appraisal of Options Considered

- 5.1. The following options were evaluated in terms of cost and perceived or likely quality in order to ensure best value for money in the provision of the service:
- Service provided by Royal Borough of Greenwich
 - In-house provision of service (in-source)
 - Pan London arrangements (Capita, contract managed by London Borough of Ealing)
 - Out-source to external third party provider by tendering in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

Costs

	Royal Borough of Greenwich	In-house	Pan London (Capita)	Outsource
Annual costs	£240,000	£532,407	As set out in the part two report	£180,887*
One-off set-up costs	£0	£0	As set out in the part two report	£Negligible*
Redundancy/ TUPE Costs	£0	£0	£32,000 (figures supplied by Royal Borough of Greenwich)	£32,000 (figures supplied by Royal Borough of Greenwich)

* Approximated using desk based research.

5.2. Outsourcing

This is the cheapest option based on desk-based, soft market testing. It is an indicative price only. Although it is potentially the cheapest price it is not the recommended option.

Out-sourcing a service of this nature often poses issues relating to quality and could

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lead to a loss of the knowledge built up by the team at Greenwich over the previous years as the Royal Borough of Greenwich have stated that they would not participate in an open tender. Although TUPE may apply it would be dependent on where an external organisation would provide its call centre from. Should it be some distance away (which is likely given the location of current organisations in the market) those staff that may be subject to TUPE could refuse to transfer on the basis that there has been a substantial change to working conditions to their material detriment. This would mean that they are deemed to have been dismissed and therefore a risk of claims from those staff could arise.

Desk-based research suggests that there are no suitable out-sourcing providers within the Borough. Subject to TUPE applying it could potentially result in the service having far less local knowledge than is currently the case, a lack of local knowledge is likely to result in longer call handling times and increased complaints. Furthermore, the ability to achieve social value for Lewisham through such an arrangement would be diminished.

Desk based research also suggests that although there are many companies offering outsourced call centres none whose client lists cite local authorities. However as part of the procurement process bidders would be asked to evidence their ability to deliver the service on behalf of a local authority.

It is also important that the supplier is able to provide live support, including reassurance and empathy not just a simple messaging service where the message is then passed on. When residents use the Out of Hours switchboard, it is generally at a point where there is an important issue and a certain level of stress, so having a live person who is empathetic and can provide assistance and reassurance at the first point of contact reduces this and is less of an alienating experience for our residents.

The above considerations make this option significantly less favourable in terms of Quality. Given all of the above, additional management and supervisory resource within the Lewisham Customer Service Centre would be required to deal with this.

Whilst opportunities for further savings may exist through out-sourcing, the likely remote nature of this approach and uncertain quality of service provision for Lewisham are of concern. Any savings made could easily be eroded by additional management required in dealing with any complaints and issues arising as well as any potential reputational damage that may ensue.

In considering outsourcing, Lewisham would need to ensure that no element of call-handling involved the use of non-UK call centres as this could have implications for data storage which could represent a risk should any issues arise; and could also bring about currency and payment concerns through fluctuations in exchange rates, cultural and time related issues.

5.3. Pan-London Framework Agreement

Transferring the service to the Pan London (Capita) service could lead to a loss of the knowledge built up by the team at Greenwich over the previous years. Although TUPE may apply, given that the call centre is in Ealing and is some distance away from their current working location, it may be that the staff subject to TUPE could refuse to transfer on the basis that there has been a substantial change to working conditions to their material detriment. This would mean that they are deemed to have been dismissed and therefore a risk of claims from those staff could arise.

A lack of local knowledge is likely to result in longer call handling times and increased complaints.

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Additional management and supervisory resource within the Lewisham Customer Service Centre would be required to deal with this.

Furthermore, the ability to achieve social value for Lewisham through such an arrangement would be diminished.

5.4. In-house:

The service was operated in-house until 2014. By entering into the current arrangements with the Royal Borough of Greenwich, savings of £200,000+ per annum have been achieved. This has mainly been through leveraging economies of scale from Greenwich's existing Out of Hours Switchboard which it could not achieve alone. Lewisham are able to benefit from the existing infrastructure, staff and management that are in place to run Greenwich's own Out of Hours service. This allows the service to handle peaks in contact volumes, sickness absence, management and support & development activities such as training and reporting at a much lower overall cost.

In effect, eight call centre agents are required to run the service with supervisors plus senior management and support staff for Quality Assurance, reporting etc. Through the current arrangements, Lewisham pay only for five call centre agents and one supervisor benefitting, free of charge, from Greenwich's existing call centre agents, management and associated support functions.

In assessing the option to provide the service In-House once again, it should be noted that as Lewisham currently have no Customer Service Centre management structure in place for Out of Hours, this would have to be provided from scratch at an additional cost. The costs shown above include the eight staff required to cover the service (as was required when the service was previously in-house) plus one Supervisor and one Operations Manager to broadly reflect the daytime structure.

Naturally, the Manager/ Supervisor would not be able to cover all operating hours so an-on-call allowance has also been factored in for this. In order to comply with Corporate policies including Single Status and lone working policies as well as the EU working time directive, Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday enhancements have been included as well as Night allowances and Overtime payments.

Whilst the service was operated in-house prior to 2014, a significantly higher number of Complaints were received relating to the service than has been the case since it has been operated by the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The current Lewisham CRM system would also require significant development and investment for it to effectively capture Out of Hours contacts and effectively support the service.

The above considerations make this option significantly less favourable in terms of cost and quality.

5.5. Royal Borough of Greenwich Cost/ Quality Considerations (Recommended Option):

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has managed the Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard since September 2015 providing Lewisham with savings of £200,000+ per annum when compared with running the service in-house. This has mainly been through leveraging economies of scale from Greenwich's existing Out of Hours Switchboard which it could not achieve alone. Lewisham are able to benefit from the existing infrastructure, staff and management that

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are in place to run Greenwich's own Out of Hours service. This allows the service to handle peaks in contact volumes, sickness absence, management and support & development activities such as training and reporting at a much lower overall cost.

In effect, eight call centre agents are required to run the service with supervisors plus senior management and support staff for Quality Assurance, reporting etc. Through the current arrangements, Lewisham pay only for five call centre agents and one supervisor benefitting, free of charge, from Greenwich's existing call centre agents, management and associated support functions.

With the exception of 2021 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and related staff absence, all Lewisham KPI's have been met or exceeded since 2015 and no formal complaints have been received in relation to the service since July 2016.

It should be noted that the Royal Borough of Greenwich have provided an exceptional quality of service to Lewisham since 2015 and that the proposal received from Greenwich offers the best value for money when compared with other options, including the costs of bringing the service back in-house. Through their familiarity with the service, it is likely that the Royal Borough of Greenwich will be able to reduce average call handling times, especially in comparison to a new service provider.

It is also worth noting that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the knowledge of staff local to the area was of vital importance in being able to provide advice and guidance on local facilities such as testing centres and support organisations.

As this option would be a continuation of the current arrangements, there is no reason to believe that the quality of service provided would differ in any way. Greenwich have a proven track record of working to reduce contact volumes and are able to offer near immediate access to alternative back-up locations throughout the Borough in case of Business Continuity/ Disaster Recovery scenarios in their main offices in Woolwich.

In addition, Greenwich have offered to maintain their prices for the period of the contract, including any extensions; thereby potentially maintaining costs at the same level until September 2028.

5.6. Conclusion of Options Appraisal

Any organisation taking calls on behalf of Lewisham would need to be able to manage some highly confidential, delicate and distressing situations. These will include calls to or from social workers, child protection issues and road traffic accidents.

An Out of Hours Switchboard acts as a front door for our residents and represents Lewisham. One that is provided by well trained, knowledgeable staff provides residents with reassurance and reflects well on the public image of Lewisham. If this is diminished in any way, this becomes a negative reflection on Lewisham for the resident.

Greenwich have demonstrated over the years that they can provide the service to a very high standard and provide the customer care that is required.

It is therefore recommended that Mayor & Cabinet approve the direct award of a contract for the Out of Hours Switchboard to the Royal Borough of Greenwich for a further period of three years with the option to extend for up to a further three years .

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6. Financial implications

- 6.1 This report seeks approval to enter into a contract with the Royal Borough of Greenwich to provide an out of hours switchboard service at a cost of £240k. The budget for this service was £231k for 2021/22 however once inflation is added the revised budget for 2022/23 is £240k and therefore the expenditure can be contained within this budget.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council's Constitution contains requirements about how to procure and manage contracts. These are in the Contract Procedure Rules (Constitution Part IV). Some of the requirements in those Rules are based on the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 as amended by the Public Procurement (Amendment act) (EU Exit) Regulations ("the Regulations") with which the Council must comply. Given the value of the contract the Regulations apply.
- 7.2 The report proposes the establishment of a contract for three years with an option to extend for up to a further 3 years. The potential value of the contract is above £500,000, which means that this is a Category A contract for the purposes of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and one which is to be awarded by the Mayor and Cabinet.
- 7.3 Although the value of the contract is above the EU financial threshold for advertising under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 ("the Regulations"), the Council is able to award a contract to Greenwich under Regulation 12(7) without advertising. Regulation 12(7) allows the direct award of a contract where the contract establishes a co-operation between the Councils with the aim of ensuring that public services they have to perform are provided with a view to achieving the objectives they have in common; the implementation is governed solely by considerations relating to the public interest; and the Council providing the service does not perform on the open market more than 20% of the activities concerned.
- 7.4 The contract to be awarded fits within the criteria set out in paragraph 7.3 therefore the contract can be awarded to the Royal Borough of Greenwich.
- 7.5 This is a Key Decision as the value of the contract is above £200,000 therefore it must be included in the Key Decision Plan.
- 7.6 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.7 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 7.8 The duty continues to be a "have regard duty", and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.
- 7.9 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance

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on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>

7.10 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

1. The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
2. Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
3. Engagement and the equality duty
4. Equality objectives and the equality duty
5. Equality information and the equality duty

7.11 The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/guidance-on-the-equality-duty/>

8. Equalities implications

8.1. The Council's equalities objectives are addressed in the specification documentation. As service provision will exactly mirror the current service, there are no further equality implications to be considered.

9. Climate change and environmental implications

9.1. No impact on the environment has been identified.

10. Crime and disorder implications

10.1. The Out of Hours Switchboard provides a conduit through which issues relating to crime and disorder in the Borough may be reported to the Council. These may be passed on to on-call officers or the emergency services as applicable, passed on to day time services in the form of a service request or provided with advice and guidance at the point of contact. It is envisaged that existing provisions in this regard would be maintained.

11. Health and wellbeing implications

11.1. The provision of a robust Out of Hours Switchboard function is a benefit to the residents of Lewisham, providing them with a resource to resolve local issues.

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12. No impact on the environment has been identified.

- 12.1. No environmental implications have been identified.

13. Social Value implications

- 13.1. RBG has a commitment to our residents to ensure that they provide value to the community.
- 13.2. Greenwich is invested in looking for and developing social value in all aspects of service to its residents. This may be in regeneration in the form of a commitment to use local supply chains to help improve the immediate environment for all residents.
- 13.3. Social value can also take the form of education and training. A number of apprentices have been taken on by the firms that Greenwich partner with. Greenwich are also committed to offering care leavers the best start into adulthood.
- 13.4. Greenwich customer services has committed itself to taking on and helping young people to start their careers with a range of apprenticeships that offer work in a supported learning environment. This will further develop the skills and knowledge to assist the apprentice to complete their qualification (where applicable) and secure future employment and progress their career in the future.
- 13.5. Greenwich looks to use the best of modern digital, technology and data to transform our services to residents, visitors, businesses, and staff. Greenwich are also committed to providing assisted digital means to ensure that customers are not being left behind. As the Out of Hours service offers a point of contact when customers find themselves in crisis and/ or an emergency situation, this service must be accessible to all and easy to use. As such, Greenwich maintain a dedicated team of call agents available throughout the night, weekends and bank holidays to be available to those most in need.
- 13.6. As an organisation, the Royal Borough of Greenwich has a corporate plan which sets out the vision and priorities that will guide the organisation through the next four years. The Royal Borough of Greenwich aims to develop its services and improve the lives of its residents by focussing its actions and resources on the things that matter to the residents of Royal Greenwich:
 - A healthier Greenwich
 - A safer Greenwich
 - A great place to grow up
 - Delivering homes through economic growth
 - A cleaner, greener Greenwich
 - Economic prosperity for all
 - A great place to be
 - A strong, vibrant and well-run Borough.
- 13.7. Compatibility between the Boroughs is expressed by similar social values with the core strategy aligned to the Lewisham Social value and Objectives:
 - Employment, Skills & Economy
 - Creating a greener Lewisham
 - Training Lewisham's future

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- 13.8. The Royal Borough of Greenwich is a neighbouring Borough, flanking Lewisham to the East
- 13.9. The Royal Borough of Greenwich and the London Borough of Lewisham are politically aligned.
- 13.10. The Royal Borough of Greenwich is a London Living Wage employer.

14. Background papers

- 14.1. Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard Specification 2022
- 14.2. LBL Service Specific Processes

15. Glossary

Term	Definition
Out-source/ out-sourcing	The buying in of services from outside suppliers rather than by supplying them internally.
In-source/ in-sourcing	Use one's own personnel or resources to accomplish (a task) that was previously outsourced.
TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006. A situation that may arise when a business or part of a business (the transferor) changes ownership and staff transfer to the new owner (the transferee).
Calls Offered	The term 'calls offered' refers to the total number of calls placed in a queue including calls answered and unanswered.
Call handling times	Call Handling Times take into account the time from when the caller gets through to an advisor until they have hung up.

16. Report author(s) and contact

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- 16.3. Comments for and on behalf of the Director of Law, Governance and Elections: Mia Agnew, Senior Contracts Lawyer.

17. Appendices

- Appendix A – Lewisham Out of Hours Switchboard Specification 2022

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